



**Date of Council Worksession: August 11, 2014**

**TOWN OF LEESBURG  
TOWN COUNCIL WORKSESSION**

**Subject:** Remote Air Traffic Control Tower Pilot Program

**Staff Contact:** Scott Coffman, Airport Manager

The Leesburg Executive Airport has grown to one of the busiest non-towered airports on the East coast. With an interest in enhancing safety and improving efficiency, the Airport Commission recently began research into the FAA's criteria to establish a control tower at Leesburg. Upon discovering the high cost to construct a physical control tower building, the Virginia Department of Aviation helped facilitate an introduction to SAAB Sensis.

SAAB Sensis produces a Remote Air Traffic Control Tower product called rTower. An rTower replaces the traditional airport control tower building with an array of cameras and communications which are linked to a remote workstation. The workstation is surrounded by large high-resolution displays and is manned by air traffic controllers, who direct the air traffic at the airport. Aside from its lower purchase cost, the advantage of the system is that workstations from multiple airports can be co-located to a single location, reducing personnel and facility costs. The rTower was approved in Europe and is in use at several airports in Norway and Sweden, but has not been certified for use in the US.

In order to gain the FAA's approval the Virginia Department of Transportation's public-private research arm, called VSATS, has agreed to help fund a test of the system. VSATS and SAAB have selected the Leesburg Executive Airport as an ideal location to hold a test during the summer of 2015.

At our airport, an rTower workstation would be installed inside a room at the airport terminal along with the camera array located on the rooftop. A trailer-mounted physical control tower would be located on the aircraft ramp to provide a safety comparison between a traditional tower and the rTower. Aircraft traffic to and from Leesburg would be controlled for approximately 12 hours per day during a three-month test period while the FAA collects safety and risk management data.

The Town is requested to provide limited in-kind contributions including space, power, phone, and internet; however supplemental budget appropriations are not anticipated. Staff would cooperate during design meetings and would receive system training for any needed field repairs. If the rTower receives FAA certification, the Town could ask the FAA to provide permanent air traffic control services at Leesburg Executive. The Town could additionally apply for State and Federal assistance to purchase a permanent rTower installation.